

Taking Stock Study: Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD)

Accomplishments and Opportunities

Introduction

In 2009, the Illinois Early Learning Council recommended the creation of a Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) to facilitate cross system collaboration to advance a more unified early childhood system, which ensures high quality care and education for children birth to age 5. In the past five years, OECD has undergone changes in leadership and has taken responsibility for securing major federal funds including the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECH-V) grant.

Illinois receives funding from the BUILD Initiative to support the state's work to set policy, offer services and advocate for children from birth to age five. In the fall 2014, BUILD commissioned a quick turn-around study of OECD to take stock of the accomplishments and opportunities of the office. Since the office had been in existence for five years and numerous federal grant initiatives had been launched since the creation of OECD, the timing was right for taking a step back and obtaining stakeholder perspectives regarding the impact and role of the office.

Objectives, Scope and Methodology

In late September 2014, the BUILD Initiative contracted with Diane Schilder to conduct a quick turn-around study with the following objectives:

- Obtain key Illinois stakeholder perspectives on the role and impact of the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD)
- Assess the role of the OECD in light of key changes in the national and state early childhood landscape including but not limited to the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant, the MIECH-V, and the Preschool Development Grant
- Analyze the role of OECD as it compares with other state's structures to support early childhood policy and programming
- Based on analysis of Illinois stakeholder data and lessons learned from other states, propose changes to strengthen the role and structure of OECD

The study was designed to address the following questions:

- What are the perceived role and impact of OECD?
- Does OECD have the structure, authority, and staffing it needs to effectively fulfill its role?
- What steps should the state take to sustain OECD once federal grant funds that support the office are no longer available?
- What administrative models and structures that exist in other states would work best for Illinois?

The study was designed to begin in early October and conclude by early November. The scope of the study was to focus on key Illinois stakeholder perspectives with the understanding that the

information would be analyzed in light of other state's experiences developing administrative structures that support early childhood policy and programming.

Methodology

Between early October and early November 2014, Dr. Schilder conducted telephone interviews, in person interviews and a focus group with early childhood stakeholders in Illinois. A structured interview and focus group protocol was used to assess perspectives regarding OECD's role and impact, the clarity of OECD's vision, role and responsibilities, the effectiveness of the office, and recommendations regarding whether the governor's early childhood office should continue after the federal grant funds are spent and if so, what structure, funding, role and responsibility would best meet the needs of young children and families in Illinois.

A total of 21 stakeholders in the state provided perspectives through interviews or focus groups and documents were reviewed. Key stakeholders represented five major constituencies: state administrative agency staff, OECD staff, advocates, private providers, and foundation representatives and funders. State agency staff included those with responsibility over major early childhood programs and services within the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Illinois Department of Public Health. The OECD staff included those with executive authority over the office, an individual with administrative responsibility over aspects of the RTT-ELC including the state Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and staff responsible for MIECH-V programming. Advocates and private providers represented the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Illinois Action for Children, and Voices for Illinois Children. Foundation representatives included staff from two Illinois foundations and staff from BUILD.

The qualitative data were analyzed employing a grounded theory approach in which the key themes that emerged were reviewed with stakeholders to assess convergence of recommendations and perspectives and divergence of perspectives. The research was guided by a hypothesis that individuals with differing roles would have divergent perspectives and therefore when divergent themes arose the data were analyzed based on whether the perspectives differed based on role and responsibility.

Recommendations in Brief

- OECD has played an important role for the state and the office should be given formal authority
- OECD has played a critical role in Illinois in securing and overseeing federal grants that support early childhood programming and services in the state
- To effectively administer OECD, it is critically important that the individual appointed as the executive director demonstrate strong skills, dispositions and abilities (that the current Executive Director possesses). Specifically, it is critical that the Executive Director:
 - Possess in depth content knowledge of early childhood programs and systems,
 - Has expertise in developing initiatives and grant proposals
 - Is viewed as a valued expert and leader nationally and within the state.
 - Has strong positive working relationships with key public and private stakeholders.
 - Demonstrates an ability to engage stakeholders in forwarding an early childhood

- agenda
 - Serves as the liaison to ELC and state agencies to assure the early childhood vision and associated funding and policy priorities are clearly communicated
 - Has demonstrated ability to navigate during challenging times and addresses a range of barriers to strengthening the early childhood system.
- Opportunities exist to strengthen the OECD office by:
 - Clearly articulating that OECD speaks for the governor's policy priorities and is empowered to compel state agencies to comply with these priorities
 - Assuring that the Executive Director is charged with articulating and coordinating policy across state agencies, aligning systems, and is responsible for key funding decisions at the state agency level
 - Developing clear guidance regarding the roles and responsibilities of OECD vis-à-vis the Early Learning Council (ELC) and state agencies such as the Department of Human Resources and the Illinois State Board of Education
 - Providing a staffing structure that allows the Executive Director to carry out the role of communicating the vision and associated details regarding the vision
 - Supporting the office through sustained funding
- Stakeholders offered suggestions for steps to take to strengthen the office by clarifying roles and responsibilities and clearly communicating the authority of the office to all key stakeholders.

Detailed Findings

This section begins with a brief description of the background and context that affected the study and then presents the key findings based on analysis of the data.

Background and Context

In 2009, the Illinois Governor created the Office of Early Childhood Development to facilitate cross system collaboration to advance a more unified early childhood system, which ensures high quality care and education for children birth to age 5. In the past five years, the office has undergone changes in leadership and has taken responsibility for securing major federal funds including the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECH-V) grant.

OECD was conceptualized by the Illinois Early Learning Council, a statutorily established body which comprises public and private leaders who support early childhood programming and policies. At the time the office was established, according to numerous individuals who were interviewed, some advocated for a separate state agency—similar to the agencies established by states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Yet there was a consensus at the time that the creating an office of early childhood development within the governor's office would position the issues well and the political capital that would need to be expended should instead be spent on building the system.

Since the creation of OECD, despite the fact that Illinois has been in the forefront of state early childhood policy and program development, the budget deficits of recent years have affected

state funding for early childhood. Illinois has a long history of strong public-private partnerships that support early childhood programming, with three major advocacy organizations taking on critical issues to strengthen the early childhood system and numerous foundations providing funding to support a strong early childhood system.

The current budget crisis, reductions in state agency staffing and associated expertise, and lack of political will to support state funds for early childhood affect the perspectives of stakeholders regarding what is best for the state. Numerous stakeholders recommended administrative and staffing structures to strengthen early childhood but then stated, “but right now that is not possible.” And, others mentioned that it is important to account for the ‘rightful fatigue’ that early childhood administrators, advocates and providers feel given the contextual issues.

OECD Office is Valued by Stakeholders

All of the stakeholders who participated in the study reported that they saw value in having an administrative body that focuses on early childhood issues as a whole rather than merely focusing on individual programs. Advocates, private providers, funders and state government agencies stakeholders reported that it is beneficial for the governor’s office to focus on early childhood issues and the office provides a structure for putting forth the governor’s early childhood vision.

Study participants reported that since the current Executive Director has taken on leadership of the office, OECD has been effective at facilitating coordination among state agencies and between public and private entities. Moreover, the office has been extremely effective at garnering substantial federal grant support to further the state’s early childhood agenda. Study participants reported, “OECD is more than a liaison but serves as a nexus between the public and the private entities working on early childhood issues. The office brokers early childhood policy and positions among state agency people and the very powerful and influential advocate and philanthropic community.”

Of significant note, the OECD has facilitated the development of a series of federal grant applications that have been successfully funded. The development of the applications reflects a dialogue among early childhood stakeholders. One study participant reported that OECD has been effective at garnering federal resources through MIECH-V and RTT-ELC. Another stated, “The policy that is embedded in the proposals reflects having a dialogue and getting input of key stakeholders so that what is proposed potentially garners more leverage.” Stakeholders reported that charging OECD with proposal development resulted in a more inclusive process than contracting to an outside proposal developer. State agency personnel reported that the proposal development process that was employed prior to charging the OECD with responsibility felt reactive and unrealistic. One agency director reported, that charging OECD with responsibility has resulted in a greater understanding of what is feasible and what can be done within certain timelines. This study participant reported, “I feel that working within the governor’s office provides a better perspective on what state government can do.”

Two sizable grants that the office has garnered include the \$52.5 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant¹ and over \$6.1² million MIECH-V awards. In addition, OECD supported local Head Start grantees with the development of Early Head Start/Child Care proposals and led the development of the state's preschool development proposal.

Of further value, participants reported that in recent years OECD created and spearheaded an interagency team that focuses on how to address barriers to a more seamless and integrated early childhood system.³ The Interagency Team (IAT) is comprised of senior managers from ISBE, IDHS, IDCFS, Head Start Collaboration Office, and OECD and ELC. The IAT meets regularly to work toward strategic alignment of priorities and work at the state level. One study participant reported, "There is a lot of time that this interagency team comes together on early childhood to talk about what they are doing and talk about ways to connect more. There is a good feeling among the government leaders about this."

OECD Executive Director Demonstrates Effective Leadership

Without exception, the stakeholders who participated in the study reported that the current Executive Director of OECD demonstrates effective leadership and has the needed knowledge, skills and disposition to lead the office. Most study participants reported that there had been a transition in leadership and noted that the current Executive Director, "does a stunning job at playing the hand she's been dealt."

When asked about the effectiveness of OECD, one study participant reported, "I think OECD is very effective – it is all about the leadership."

When probed about the specific knowledge, skills and dispositions needed, study participants reports were similar. A majority noted that the leader must be a recognized content expert, with a strong understanding of early childhood programming and systems. In addition, the person must be recognized as a leader in Illinois and nationally. Numerous study participants noted that to be effective the Executive Director must demonstrate an ability to engage stakeholders in forwarding an early childhood agenda and serve as a liaison between the Governor's Office, the Early Learning Council, and state agencies as well as private providers and funders. An associated skill that was noted by many is the ability to communicate a collective vision. One individual reported that she was impressed by the ability to work across diverse stakeholders, garner input from multiple perspectives and digest the information into a cohesive plan that can be implemented.

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Education (2014), Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Phase 2 Scores and Awards. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/awards-phase-2.html>

² Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2014). MIECH-V Awards. Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://ersrs.hrsa.gov/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?/HGDW_Reports/FindGrants/GRANT_FIND&ACTIVITY=D89&rs:Format=HTML4.0 and http://ersrs.hrsa.gov/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?/HGDW_Reports/FindGrants/GRANT_FIND&ACTIVITY=X02&rs:Format=HTML4.0

³ John Snow, Inc. (2013)

The ability to develop coherent proposals is one important skill that was mentioned by numerous study participants. Stakeholders reported that the Executive Director must be adept at not simply writing winning proposals, but skilled at developing proposals that reflected broad stakeholder perspectives with detailed implementation plans. One participant reported that the skill goes beyond “the mechanics of proposal writing” and entails creating a cohesive plan that addresses key systems issues that need to be address to support young children. Two other study participants provided additional evidence of the importance of this skill for the Executive Director:

I don’t know how she does it in terms of keeping so many balls in the air and having knowledge of so many different projects and initiatives and things that are going on. That is incredibly valuable . . . This is helpful in terms of trying to connect dots.

There is no one else who can take in and chew up and organize a huge amount of information. She has tentacles in all of the programs and a deep understanding of the content. Her capacity to manage all of this stuff and get it down on paper and make it coherent is quite phenomenal. She is pretty unique in that way.

Finally, multiple individuals noted that the context in Illinois has been challenging and that any effective Executive Director must possess the ability to navigate during difficult and challenging times. Specifically, individuals noted that to effectively manage the office, the individual must be able to navigate during times of fiscal and political uncertainty, focus attention on an overall vision during times of budget crises, and engage stakeholders and agency personnel with differing perspectives and constraints.

Early Childhood Vision is Clear, Opportunities Exist to Communicate the Vision

Nearly all stakeholders reported that the early childhood vision for the state is quite clear. Stakeholders reported that the vision is for the state, at highest level, to support a well-coordinated, accessible, easy-to-navigate early childhood system that focuses first on those children and families with the highest needs and provides them accessible high-quality services. Many stakeholders reported that the OECD’s role in communicating the vision has been “very articulate and when they speak they speak from a state early childhood system perspective.” Yet, other reported opportunities exist to better communicate the vision.

Three somewhat overlapping challenges in communicating the larger vision were reported. First, multiple stakeholders reported that OECD has been focused on strong implementation of the federal grants and that as a result, some feel the focus on implementation has obscured the focus on the larger vision. Secondly, the complexity of the system with different administrative structures among state agencies, shifting personnel, and community grants, requires ongoing simple effective communication of the overall vision. Third, the rules and regulations regarding existing federal and state programs require an ongoing and sustained focus on how to best address all of the barriers and a simple ongoing focus on the bigger vision could assist with this work. One study participant illustrated how the context has created challenges, “When you look at the ongoing challenges of implementing grants– you are no longer visioning and building out new policies. You are executing a grant that you hope is aligned but your real job is executing the grants.” An alternate perspective offered by some was that the implementation of the federal grants was the work of realizing the vision, rather than a distraction from it. Nonetheless, stakeholders recommended that clear, ongoing communication around the vision could benefit the state and OECD.

Federal Grants Have Provided Opportunities and Challenges

The federal grants have provided opportunities for Illinois to implement aspects of the early childhood vision that would not be possible without the large infusion of federal dollars during a time of economic challenges for the state. Most stakeholders reported benefits from the federal grants. One individual reported, “We’ve gotten a lot of opportunity with these federal grants. Now we need to embed the best parts into the state system in terms of priority wise and working toward scale.”

Stakeholders reported that the OECD has focused on using federal funds to build components of the early childhood system that will be sustained beyond the grant funding. For example, a number of stakeholders reported that funds were spent to refine the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) ExceleRate Illinois to include all early education providers. The study participant reported, “We had the vision when we wrote the RTT-ELC, that Child Care, Preschool for All and Head Start would all be in the same rating system. Now the system has been built and will last beyond the RTT-ELC funding.”

Similarly, stakeholders reported that the MIECH-V grant has been used to leverage alignment among home visiting programs. One study participant reported, “We are working to do more alignment. MIECH-V is seen as a vehicle that will change the system for the better.” Individuals reported that as a result of MIECH-V work, the state has submitted a strong waiver for Medicaid to be able to use funding to offer more seamless home visiting services. If approved, this waiver will assure financing of more comprehensive home visiting services.

While the federal funds have been extremely important for the state, some study participants reflected on some challenges that had resulted from the grants. Some suggested that while OECD was responsible for ensuring that the activities and outcomes articulated in the proposals were realized, OECD had no authority over the agencies responsible for implementation. Separately, some noted that from their perspective, the focus on the federal funds diverted attention from the larger vision of early childhood. For example, one participant reported that because early education and home have been a priority for the office, it has appeared that other important early childhood programs such as maternal and child health programs and other health programs have not been part of the OECD’s focus.

Greater Clarity Regarding Role and Responsibility of the OECD Needed

OECD’s role and responsibility over coordinating a shared early childhood vision is clear to most stakeholders. Nonetheless, many reported that greater clarity regarding the authority and responsibilities of OECD is now needed since the office has been in existence for five years and has secured large federal grants. One study participant voiced a concern echoed by many, “With regards to the office as a whole their role is to guide early childhood policy for the state and they do a good job with that. Their job is clear. The mechanics get a bit fuzzy.”

Many stakeholders reported that the timing is now right for clarifying the responsibility of OECD vis-à-vis the Early Learning Council and state agencies. Some stated that when the office was first created, its primary role was to staff the ELC but now the office has more responsibilities ranging from working with the IAT to overseeing federal grants and communicating the governor’s policy priorities.

Currently, OECD is responsible for ensuring that state agencies implement activities that were

proposed in federal grants, but its role has been to “cajole and request” that agencies abide by the commitments made in the grant applications. Some reported that it is not clear that OECD speaks on behalf of the Governor and currently there are no consequences when state agencies focus on priorities other than those articulated by OECD. An additional related challenge is that state agency directors of programs reported that because some federal proposals required extremely tight turn-around times, some proposals have been “ratified by state agencies through silence rather than through active engagement.” OECD reported that staff engaged state agency personnel in key decisions, but some staff reported that agency directors needed to be more actively engaged in understanding and addressing barriers to implementation. While this challenge has been experienced, state agency personnel noted that the existence of the IAT provides a possible platform for engaging state agency personnel more directly in future federal development activities.

The challenge regarding roles and responsibilities is exacerbated by a number of issues. OECD lacks authority over budgets, is not a fiscal agent for the federal grants, and has no oversight over state-funded programs and services. Secondly, state agency staff responsible for implementing the federal grant activities have very heavy workloads because of reductions in state agency budgets, and now they have additional responsibilities because of the federal grants. Some reported that state agencies had been “cut to the bone” and the new federal requirements are on top of an extremely heavy workload. Moreover, each state agency has its unique administrative structure and associated requirements. For example, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requires review of education programs and policies, which can affect implementation timelines. Finally, currently OECD is responsible for some aspects of implementation but there are no clear lines of supervision and authority between OECD and some agency staff responsible for implementation.

Study participants reported that the new federal dollars are significant but are dwarfed by the child care, pre-K and state and Medicaid-funded home visiting budgets and programs. Study participants noted that new initiatives are designed to create more efficient and seamless services. At the same time, program directors remain ultimately responsible for implementing the programs and services under their jurisdiction. Some agency staff reported that existing programs and services comprise the majority of the workload and are therefore attention to the overall program often is the priority. One study participant reported that clearer guidance and associated supports regarding priorities would go a long way toward creating more aligned systems that best serve children and families. Another reported that in the absence of stronger authority, OECD is simply asking very busy professionals to add to their workload.

Despite this challenge, one study participant reported that, “The fact that there are people in this office working exclusively on early childhood is really good. . . The people in the office are committed to accomplishing the goals that we set out, are task oriented, goal focused, and everything you would want to have on the team moving toward the goal.” This point of view was echoed by many who were interviewed.

Numerous stakeholders recommended clear lines of responsibility between OECD, the ELC, and state agencies. One study participant reported, “It is much easier for them to manage organizations and personnel that are directly responsible to you. On the one hand the agencies

are accountable [to what they proposed in the federal grant applications] but maybe not so much.” Another stakeholder reported, “OECD needs more than just the nominal nod.”

Many reported that greater clarity regarding authority, roles and responsibilities would produce benefits. One agency staff person reported, “What is the charge that the Governor gives to OECD? Is it similar to the state agency head? It would be helpful to those of us implementing programs if the Governor said, ‘I would like you to be responsive to OECD’ and the Governor was actively engaged and saw OECD as a genuine emissary. This way agency heads would understand the Governor’s priorities and that would be a huge step forward, but it would change the dynamic substantially.” The “fuzzy” roles and responsibilities have led to lack of clarity regarding expectations and priorities that could be ameliorated if the state had a clearer organizational chart regarding authority over early childhood programming.

Divergence of Perspectives Exists on Best Structure and Authority for OECD

Most stakeholders reported that the creation of a single separate state early childhood “code” agency would be the best way to realize the vision of a seamless early childhood system that supports the most vulnerable young children and their families, but “that will not happen at this time.” Stakeholders expressed divergent perspectives when asked to recommend changes in the administrative authority and structure to strengthen early childhood services and programming in Illinois. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents recommended that in the short term that the State should strengthen the existing OECD and grant it greater authority. Others recommended creating a new early childhood agency; a minority view that was presented was to change the current OECD to focus more narrowly on conveying the Governor’s policy priorities to state agency directors. These divergent perspectives are presented in more detail below.

Issue an Executive Order or Pass Legislation Granting Authority to OECD

A majority of stakeholders recommended strengthening the OECD through an Executive Order or legislation that would grant the office authority over policy. Stakeholders offered specific suggestions regarding steps to strengthen the office. Some recommended that a small group of early childhood stakeholders in the state review other state’s legislative and Executive Order language and prepare a draft Executive Order or legislation that clearly grant authority to OECD. The language should be reviewed and carefully vetted with key stakeholders to assure that the language clearly grants the office authority over policies that affect individual state agencies, funding decisions, and systems alignment within each state agency. One study participant stated, “It isn’t enough to formally authorize the office. It is essential that the office be given authority to act on behalf of the Governor. The language has to put teeth into what it means to be responsible for early childhood for the state.”

By granting stronger authority to OECD, state agency directors and program managers can have greater clarity regarding the overall focus of how each program fits into a system. Another study participant reported, “People do what you tell them to do and you aren’t always aware of what you are telling them to do. There are no consequences for failing to pay attention. OECD currently has no authority [over budgets, staff, and program decisions] and state agency personnel which provides a clear message to agency staff about what the government’s priorities are.”

One specific challenge mentioned repeatedly is that across programs and state agencies, different contracting language is employed which creates fundamental challenges for providers attempting to create more seamless services for the most vulnerable children and families. Each state agency has its own legal department that requires different language and as a result the services that are delivered by an individual program will differ depending upon the source of funding. To address this challenge, OECD must be granted authority to work with state agency directors and legal teams to craft language that meets federal and state legislative requirements that can be used across programs.

One respondent reported that the work of state agencies to align monitoring, contracting and fiscal policies requires buy-in from state agency directors and that in the absence of such buy-in challenges exist for staff attempting to address barriers. Clearer lines of authority regarding OECD and state agencies would address some of these challenges.

As a next step, stakeholders recommended the following specific actions:

- Review other states' language authorizing a Governor's Office that has authority over fiscal, policy, contracting, and monitoring issues related to young children and adapt to meet the unique Illinois context. Vet the language with key stakeholders to assure it has the "teeth" needed to assure the office has authority needed to address barriers to seamless systems.
- Create an organizational chart that clearly delineates how the roles and responsibilities of OECD are unique and different from those of the ELC and state agencies.
- Garner the Governor's ongoing and vocal support of the OECD to communicate to state agencies, private providers, funders and others that the office is speaking on behalf of the Governor and therefore has the authority over funding, policy and programming priorities.
- Develop a clear communication plan so that state agencies, the ELC and community providers are aware of the vision and the specific implementation steps required to create a more cohesive early childhood system.
- OECD should create a management structure in which all of the early childhood federal grant programs, state agencies responsible for early childhood and private partners are engaged on a regular basis in reviewing how each program can address the needs of the overall system.
- Devote funding and resources to adequately support OECD through dedicated funding. Divergent perspectives were expressed. Some recommended a line item to support a sustained office that would exist beyond the federal grant cycles and others recommended that each state agency with jurisdiction over specific early childhood programming contribute a portion to support the office.

Creation of a New Early Childhood Agency

As noted above, most stakeholders recommended that the state ultimately create a new early childhood agency with many caveats. Some suggested that the political capital required to enact legislation would be better spent garnering support for early childhood programming and services. Others suggested that the current political and economic climate in which resources are scarce would prevent the creation of a new state agency. And, the position that a new agency is possible in the future was viewed with skepticism – one individual reported that it is always important to consider policy recommendations within a political, economic and social context

and speculating about a possible new state agency 10 years down the road is not a positive use of resources.

Several arguments in favor of a new state agency were expressed. Stakeholders reported that a new early childhood agency would:

- Be best positioned to address barriers to more seamless service delivery at the community level. It would have a single legal department reporting to an agency director that could more easily assist with shared contracting language. A single unit responsible for overseeing monitoring and compliance could address the specific barriers to differing federal and state monitoring requirements. And, a single unit responsible for overseeing professional development would be better positioned to address different regulations and create a more cohesive system for staff.
- Have an agency director who reported directly to the Governor, which would strengthen the overall position of early childhood within the state and give the director more leverage to address barriers that exist across individual programs.
- Be responsible for federal and state programs and funds, and could allocate funding and issue policies consistent with an overall early childhood vision.
- Create efficiencies in administering services and programming that meets the needs of Illinois most vulnerable children and families.

These comments are consistent with those outlined in the 2013 report by Regenstein & Lipper on governance structures that support early childhood programming. The document reports that three states—Georgia, Massachusetts, and Washington—have created new state agencies. Since the document was released, Connecticut has created a new Office of Early Childhood. According to the report Massachusetts' Department of Early Education and Care was created by legislation in 2005 and this agency has authority over and accountability for early education and care and after-school services for families. The Massachusetts Department is one of three state departments overseen by a single Secretary who oversees an Executive Office of Education (the other state education agencies oversee elementary and secondary and higher education). The governor established Washington's early childhood agency, which is a cabinet-level state agency responsible for programs previously scattered across several departments. And, Georgia's state agency was first established by statute in 1996, and then in 2004 the Georgia legislature passed legislation to create a new agency responsible for all aspects of early childhood.

States that have created a single state agency have grappled with administrative, programmatic and logistical considerations that must be addressed by any state that is undertaking a major overhaul in administrative structures. Key questions that states have addressed include:

- Does the director of new agency have a Cabinet position or does the director report to a Cabinet appointee?
- What programs are included in the new agency? For example are the following included in the new agency or housed elsewhere: Head Start State Collaboration Office, Child Care Administrator, Early Childhood Specialist overseeing pre-K, Director of Home Visitation, Special Education (including Parts B and C), the Maternal/Child Health Director, etc.
- What is the relationship between the new agency and K-12 education and how can the new agency best address transition between early childhood programs and K-12 schools?

- What is the best strategy for the state to transition to the new agency? Should there be a phase-in period or should the agency be established quickly?
- What steps can be taken to assure buy-in of key stakeholders including state agency staff and personnel to work toward a cohesive vision?
- The creation of a new state agency does not guarantee greater alignment and cohesion among early childhood policies and therefore what structures and processes need to be in place to ensure the new agency is best positioned to support a more seamless early childhood systems.

Create Governor's Early Childhood Policy Position

Several state stakeholders suggested creating an early childhood policy position that reports directly to the governor. A number of state agency staff noted that over their tenure their agencies had received direct guidance from the governor regarding funding, policy and programmatic decisions. They noted that this person's role was focused on communicating the governor's positions, facilitating consensus among state agencies, and coordinating policies. Study participants articulated several advantages of such a role as well as several reasons that such a position would not be sufficient to accomplish the envisioned purpose of OECD:

- The Governor's Early Childhood Advisor would clearly be speaking on behalf of the Governor and would be in a position to inform decisions about funding, policies, and programs.
- Focusing primarily on policy and coordination across agencies would ameliorate the challenges faced related to program implementation.
- Creating a new policy advisor would not necessarily address the structural and organizational challenges that currently exist.
- Focusing only on coordinating policy would not address the structural and systems barriers that current exist within and across agencies.

Conclusion

The three alternative arrangements should be considered in the context of the current political, economic and social climate. Stakeholders strongly recommended clarity in the role and responsibility of OECD but provided alternative approaches to addressing the challenges. As the Governor considers next steps, it is important to consider the trade-offs among administrative options. Any option, including simply retaining the existing structure has very practical, logistical issues that must be addressed. The question that should be asked is, after considering the practical trade-offs, which structure will best support Illinois' vision of creating a seamless system that best meets the needs of the neediest children and families?

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